



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

# HARVARD THEOLOGICAL REVIEW

VOLUME VI

APRIL, 1913

NUMBER 2

---

## *THE PRACTICABILITY OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE*

FRANCIS G. PEABODY

HARVARD UNIVERSITY

The unknown apostle who wrote the wholesome letter to Titus, "his own son after the common faith," re-enforces his general doctrine of Christian ethics by a special application to the circumstances in which Titus finds himself at Crete. The Christian life, the apostle writes, is practicable even there. The Cretans, where Titus had been left "to set in order the things that are wanting," were, as one of themselves had said, "liars, beasts, and gluttons." "This witness," the writer agrees, "is true"; but this truth is precisely what gives an opportunity for Titus to teach the Cretans a "sound" or "healthful" doctrine of chastity, discretion, and gravity. "The grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared unto all men." Crete was a good place for a Christian "to adorn the doctrine of God." The problem of the Christian life was not to run away from a bad place, but to serve it and save it. We should live "soberly, righteously, and godly," not in a world of our own choosing, but "in this present world." Soberly as concerns one's self, righteously as concerns one's neighbor, piously in one's relation to God,—these three laws made, according to the Apostle, a practicable rule of conduct for a young man of the first century in a vicious and pleasure-loving world.

But could a Christian teacher speak so confidently now? Is the Christian life practicable in this present world? Is it possible to live in the world as it now is, accepting its methods, participating in its business, involved in its social, economic, and political machinery, and at the same time maintain a sober, right-

eous, and godly life, fit to adorn the doctrine of God? Amid the licentiousness and commercialism of modern society can a domestic life be so maintained that it may be with reasonable accuracy described as a Christian family? Amid the brutal competitions of modern industry can trade be administered and profits be made in ways which are consistent with Christian discipleship? Amid the plottings of national politics and the collisions of international interests can we fairly speak of a Christian civilization? Is the Christian life, in other words, practicable among the inevitable conditions of modern efficiency and happiness; or is it the survival of an idealism which, however beautiful it may once have been, has become impracticable today?

These questions have created in many thoughtful minds a profound sense of perplexity, and even of alarm. The world which confronts a modern man is very different from the provincial and primitive environment of the New Testament teaching; and even if this new world is less likely than that of Crete to produce liars, beasts, and gluttons, it seems quite as hard to adjust to the maxims of the Christian Gospel. A man in this modern world, for example, finds himself compelled by his circumstances to devote nine-tenths of his waking hours to the making of his living and the securing of a margin of income, but when he turns, in some hastily snatched interval, to the New Testament, he reads the unqualified command of Jesus Christ, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth." Another man is trained in habits of economy and thrift, and reads, "Sell all that thou hast and give to the poor." A student of modern methods in charity is taught to distrust as a social menace the practice of indiscriminate relief, and then finds his modern science confronted by the saying, "Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away." An unjustified attack is made on one's self or one's country, and resistance to it has to meet the words, which to Tolstoï made the central teaching of the Gospel, "If any man smite thee on the one cheek, turn to him the other also." Must one not then choose between the idealism of the Gospels and the utilitarianism of modern life? Must he not frankly confess that the Christian law of conduct and the demands of commercial or political stability "in this present world" are incompatible with

each other, and that under the circumstances of modern civilization, which one can neither escape nor for the present transform, the Christian character has become an impracticable dream?

This conclusion, which shakes the very pillars of Christian loyalty, and leaves of Christian ethics nothing more than a picturesque ruin, overthrown by the earthquakes of modern change, has come to be accepted—sometimes with satisfaction, sometimes with grave reluctance—by many students who in all other respects are at opposite poles of opinion. On the one hand are the critics of Christianity who condemn it as incompatible with modern life; on the other hand are the apologists for Christianity who explain it as never designed for modern life.

“None of us are Christians,” a distinguished English philosopher has said, “and we all know, no matter what we say, we ought not to be. . . . We have lived a long time now the professors of a creed which no one can consistently practise and which, if practised, would be as immoral as unreal.”<sup>1</sup> “*Contemptus mundi*,” a great German teacher has written, “alone is not Christianity, nor, on the other hand, can there be Christianity without an admixture of *contemptus mundi*.”<sup>2</sup> “Christianity,” declares Nietzsche with reckless rhetoric,<sup>3</sup> “is the one great curse, the one great spiritual corruption.” “It is our more strenuous and instinctive piety which forbids us to continue Christians.” Far as such critics stand from each other in all other respects, they yet agree in the conclusion that the ethics of Christianity are impracticable for people who must live in the world as it is, and that we must turn to a Hegelian, or Hellenic, or Pagan law of conduct to find guidance among the conditions of the modern world.

The same conclusion is reached, from precisely the opposite side, by interpreters of the New Testament who find the record dominated by the thoughts and hopes of a special time and race, so that it forfeits all claim to universal significance. Such, for example, is the logical conclusion derived from the so-called eschatological, or apocalyptic, view of the Gospels. It has been of late pointed out with a fulness never before attempted that

<sup>1</sup> F. H. Bradley, *International Journal of Ethics*, October, 1894.

<sup>2</sup> F. Paulsen, *A System of Ethics*, tr. 1906, pp. 95, 96.

<sup>3</sup> *Sämmtliche Werke*, 1895, viii, 270; xiii, 317.

much of the language of the Gospels and much of the literature which lies behind the Gospels is colored by the anticipation of an approaching catastrophe, which was to make an end of the existing social order and to usher in the Messiah's kingdom. This great expectation made, it is urged, the central motive of the teaching of Jesus, and preparation for this millennial revolution must have been to the first disciples a supreme concern.

It must be admitted that many passages of the Gospels go far to confirm this eschatological view. A millennial hope unquestionably burned in the hearts of the Hebrew people, and the ministry of Jesus no doubt fanned this hope into a flame. "Ye shall see the Son of Man coming in his glory"; "The time is at hand"; "There are some standing here who shall not taste of death until they see the Son of Man in his glory"; "Watch, make you ready"; "The fashion of this world passeth away"—these, and many similar prophecies of a world-judgment, repeat the warnings of an impending catastrophe which abound in the Apocalyptic writings. If, therefore, as is confidently argued, the cardinal principle of New Testament interpretation is to be found in this feverish anticipation of the end of the existing world, then the ethics of Christianity must be shaped by this expectation and must be appropriate, not to social conditions which are fixed or permanent, but to a fleeting and perishing world. There must be an *interim* ethics, acceptable to those only whose minds are dominated by the millennial dream. Christian ethics was a product of this early expectation and must share its fate. *Interim* conduct, adapted to a world that is to pass away, cannot be appropriate to a world that is permanent. "The ethics of heaven," as Paulsen has said, "cannot be at the same time the ethics of earth." When, therefore, the dreams of the early Christians proved to be illusory, and the later followers of Jesus were forced to adjust themselves to an unregenerated world, it became necessary either to abandon the ethical teaching of the Gospels or to transform it into principles which could be rationally obeyed. Christian conduct could not be permanently inspired by a manifest, even though a magnificent, mistake.

This conclusion, though it be defended as contributory to conservatism, is in fact completely destructive of Christianity as an

historical religion. The foundation of faith becomes, not the simple teaching of the Synoptic Gospels, but the mystical visions reported after the Master's death. "The final tendency of advanced theology," Dr. Forsyth does not hesitate to affirm,<sup>4</sup> "is backward . . . and its great act of violence is the driving of a wedge between the Synoptics and the Epistles, between the message of Jesus and the Gospel of his apostles." The Synoptics exhibit, under this interpretation, "an incomplete situation, a raw audience, and an inchoate context of evidence." "It is in the Epistles that we have the essence of Christianity." The apostolic inspiration . . . takes as much precedence of his earthly and (partly) interim teaching as the finished work is more luminous than the work in progress." As another English writer has said, "Christ must be looked at in two ways; as the historical Jesus, who lived in Palestine, . . . and as the Eternal Christ. . . . When a man discards the claims of the historical Jesus he is guilty of the 'minor rejection'; but when he pushes away from him all desire or acceptance of the Ideal Christ, that involves what I may call the 'major excommunication.'"<sup>5</sup>

The first impression made by this new defence of the faith is that it turns the New Testament upside down. Paul, not Jesus, becomes the real founder of the Christian religion. The Epistles, not the Gospels, are its precious documents. Jesus was not understood until he was gone. Indeed, he did not understand himself. Orthodoxy thus becomes saved at the loss of historicity. The Sermon on the Mount and the Parables are subordinated to the mysticism of Christian tradition. "*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes*." Christian faith is not likely to find itself strengthened by this undermining of its foundations. The creeds are but poorly defended when they are set in sharp contrast with the facts. Even more obvious, however, is the fact that Christian ethics on these terms become impracticable. We are left, not with a teaching of duty, but with a rapt communion of the spirit which is possible to the elect alone. Phrases like "the imitation of Christ" and "the discipleship of Jesus" have lost their meaning. Contemplation has supplanted obedience. The knowledge of the doctrine supersedes the doing of the will. Eschatology has elimi-

<sup>4</sup> The Person and Place of Jesus Christ, 1909, pp. 133, 168, 169.

<sup>5</sup> Lloyd, Studies of Buddhism in Japan, 1908, p. 29.

nated ethics. "There is nothing," as Professor Burkitt frankly confesses, "in the creeds about Christ as a teacher of the higher morality; in fact he is not spoken of as a teacher at all."

This sense of impracticability for the Christian character, which is thus a consequence alike of radical criticism and of reactionary ecclesiasticism, is confirmed by many other tendencies of modern life. Among these the most obvious is the effect which is likely to be produced by the un-Christian conduct of many who profess Christianity. If the current moral standards of Christian believers do not radically differ from those which prevail among other decent citizens, why should the Christian teaching be regarded as having unique authority? If self-sacrifice, generosity, and integrity are often found quite apart from religious profession, may not the Christian character be regarded as superfluous in modern life? Is it not probable that the prevailing standards of a time or place, the "social ethos," as Professor Sumner called it, is in fact governing habit and desire, even where religious faith appears to control? May not many people deceive themselves with the belief that they are disciples of Jesus Christ, when in fact they are children of their own age, or tradition, or race? If one should scrutinize his own conduct, might it not appear that the ideals of Christianity have become impracticable in the life he is compelled to lead?

A similar impression of impracticability may be felt if one turns from these unconscious witnesses of failure to the more heroic lives which propose to make a literal and rigorous use of the Gospel in their modern needs. When, for example, an exalted nature like that of Tolstoï breaks away from social ties, scorning and rebuking modern civilization as inconsistent with Christian faith, and at last, in the dark and cold of a Russian winter, abandons wife and family to secure for his last days Christian peace, what effect does this conduct make upon the modern mind? Reverence, honor, the hush of criticism in the presence of death—all these are world-wide, but this emotional admiration cannot disguise the hopeless impracticability of such a faith. Like the charge of Balaklava, it was magnificent but it was not war. It did not win the battle of life: it ran away from that battle. The ethics of Tolstoï, instead of facing the world, counselled a flight

from the world. Europe and Asia, as Harnack once said, met in Tolstoï, and Asia conquered. Oriental quietism became the ideal of the Christian character. Instead of saving others, Tolstoï fled from others to save himself; and by a curious Nemesis this final desire for isolation and peace was pitifully frustrated. Never was Tolstoï so much before the eyes of the world, or of so much trouble to his friends, as in his death. The lonely railway station where he lay became a camp where family and disciples guarded his last hours, and a score of reporters watched at the bedside of the old man whose supreme wish was to die alone.

If, then, says the modern man, this is Christian discipleship, it is simply not for me. If this is the sober, righteous, and godly life, then it cannot be lived "in this present world." For me and for millions like me there can be no retreat from things as they are. My ethics cannot be those of the runaway. Home and family, money-getting and money-spending, the temptations of commercial and social life—these are not to be eluded as snares for my soul. They are the essential conditions under which my soul must be saved, if saved it can be. If the Christian life means non-resistance, asceticism, monasticism, then, however beautiful and unworldly such a character may be, it must remain for me nothing more than an impracticable and unrealizable dream.

From this impression of the inapplicability of Christian ethics to modern life there have followed two sorts of consequences. On the one hand is the sentimental approval of a faith which cannot be reduced to practice. One may cherish the teaching without any idea of obeying it. Christian conduct becomes regarded as a Catholic layman may view the *vita religiosa* of the clerical orders. It is a counsel of perfection which few can accept, but which an unsanctified world may admire from afar. Thus there may ensue a view of the Christian life which is practically that of a looker-on; a conventional conformity which does not even propose to itself a genuine obedience. Certain incidents of experience—birth, marriage, and death—are consecrated to God; but the long years of work and play, of love and struggle, are ruled by motives of the world, the flesh, or the devil. One



comes to live on a left-over piety, as he may live on an inherited estate, without much thought of its origin or responsibility. The surface of life is smoothed by Christian ordinances and consolations, while the depths remain unperturbed. Thus one may be in practice a citizen of "the present world," but in theory, or in moments of profound sorrow and joy, a patron of "the sober, righteous, and godly life."

On the other hand is the more candid and open reaction from a code which is inconsistent with modern demands. If, it is argued, all that can be substituted for an incredible theology is an impossible ethics, then, it would seem, the Christian religion must be frankly discarded as inconsistent with modern thought. As the Pauline cosmology has retreated before the advance of science, so the ethics of the Gospels have become social obstructions or indorsements of wrong, and those who commit themselves to the modern spirit must, it is concluded, turn away, some with sorrow, and some with scorn. Like the men of the parable, they go their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise; while, here and there, bitterness and wrath possess one who recalls what was taught him as eternal truth, and he turns on these feeble arguments and slays them. It is folly to disguise from ourselves the extent of this defection, not only from the theology, but hardly less from the ethics of Christianity. The ominous fact confronts the modern world that a very large proportion, not only of the frivolous and superficial, but also of the serious-minded and cultivated, have simply dropped the motives of religion from among their habitual resources, and are supported in their experience by sanctions and consolations derived from science or art, from work or play. Much of this modern paganism is due, no doubt, to the reserve of science or to the preoccupation of business, but much is also due to the superfluous refinements of Christian theology and the unreal distinctions of Christian ethics.

Whatever may be the proportion of these various influences, the result is beyond dispute. We hear much of the alienation of the working-classes from religion, and new ways are bravely devised to reach the masses and to preach the Gospel to the poor. But this defection of the wage-earners, serious as it may be, does not compare in significance with the intellectual neutrality or

indifference of great numbers of the privileged and thoughtful. Fifty years ago Huxley, in a touching letter to Charles Kingsley, wrote: "Understand me that all the young men of science whom I know are essentially of my way of thinking. I know not a scoffer or an irreligious man among them, but all regard orthodoxy as you do Brahminism."<sup>6</sup> What was then but a half-recognized alienation is now unmistakable and conspicuous. A man of science, not long ago, when asked his conclusions about religious problems, answered, "We simply do not think of these things at all." A cause is in serious danger when it begins to lose the loyalty of the best trained minds; and in spite of much rallying of forces, and reckoning of statistics, and munificence of giving, it can hardly be maintained that the motives and aims which habitually govern the thought and work of the typical man of this present world are chiefly derived from the creed or the code of the Christian Church. If Christian dogma seems to ask more than reason can give, and Christian morals to involve more than social stability can endure, then the chasm between the church and the world has become permanently impassable. The church stands apart from the world, like a mediaeval castle on its inaccessible height, picturesque but remote, a noble but an unfrequented ruin.

If, then, this impression of impracticability is so general and so undisguised both among critics and defenders of the Christian teaching, must it not be concluded that Christian loyalty is likely soon to be abandoned by rational and practical minds? Must it not be confessed that the sober, righteous, and godly life commended to Titus, though practicable in Crete, is incompatible with the inevitable conditions of the modern world, and that new motives must be found for personal and social morals? On the contrary, the considerations which have been enumerated indicate with precision where the problem of Christian teaching for the moment lies. What is the fundamental fallacy in these discouraging conceptions of Christian ethics? It is the confusion of the temporary, occasional, and incidental aspects of the Gospel with its universal, spiritual, and permanent message. Literalism applied to the New Testament—however reverent it may appear to itself to be—is essentially unhistorical. It forces

<sup>6</sup> *Life and Letters*, 1900, i, 219.

each incident or phrase into the foreground of the picture, so that it has no environment of time or place, no shading or perspective; and that is to pervert history in the name of piety. A fact may be distorted quite as easily by false perspective as by false definition. The truth of history, as of nature, is to be found in the proportion and relation of facts.

When, for example, the eschatology of the Gospels is made the master-key of their meaning, it is not necessary to argue that this Messianic dream did not color the teaching of Jesus. He spoke the language of his own time and race, and he could clothe his spiritual purpose in no other form than that of the national expectation; but to drag this background of the Gospels into the foreground, and to find in Jesus merely a Hebrew enthusiast announcing a Utopian dream, is to distort the perspective of his teaching and to rob it of unity and insight. Nothing, in fact, is more unlike the teaching of Jesus than the apprehensive, excited, or nervous sense of an approaching catastrophe. His moral maxims are not based on an *interim* ethics adapted to a transitory world. On the contrary, they are—as the common sense of two thousand years has perceived—characterized by adaptability, universality, and permanence. “We cannot,” Harnack has lately said, “derive the ethical ideal from the eschatological.”<sup>7</sup> There is nothing of an *interim* ethics, nothing feverish and evanescent, in humility, forgiveness, purity of heart, sacrifice, or service; yet these, and virtues like these, are the pillars of Christian ethics. The habitual attitude of Jesus in the presence of the great problems of experience has a serenity, assurance, and sympathy, far removed from the excited anticipations of abrupt and final change; and it becomes quite as probable that the vein of eschatological allusion which runs through the Gospel betrays the preconceptions of the Evangelists as that it reveals the teacher’s mind. “Jesus above the heads of his reporters” is, as Matthew Arnold said, a wise canon of New Testament criticism. The eschatological interpretation of the Gospels, in short, confuses color with form, by-product with main intention, and finds the ethics of Jesus impracticable because it sees them out of that perspective which gave them beauty and truth.

The same conclusion may be reached as one scrutinizes more

<sup>7</sup> *Aus Wissenschaft und Leben*, 1911, ii, p. 267.

closely the Christian quietism of Tolstoï. Much there unquestionably was in the teaching of Jesus which encouraged a retreat from the complexity of civilization to simplicity, poverty, and solitude. The ascetic life, through all the Christian centuries, has found itself fortified by many sayings of the Gospels. Unworldliness, serenity, and restraint are conspicuous notes of New Testament ethics. Jesus was an Oriental, and above the turbulent vicissitudes of his life brooded a spiritual calm like a spring sunset above the hills of Galilee. But to confuse Oriental imagery with universal principles, to single out a teaching of non-resistance as the core of the Gospels, to retreat from social obligations in the name of one who gladly shared them and was called a friend of wine-bibbers and publicans—all this, however heroic it may be, is not only an impracticable discipleship but a historical perversion. It mistakes the occasionalism of the Gospels for universalism. It pictures Jesus as posing before the glass of the future, proclaiming in every utterance a universal law, when in fact he is primarily concerned with the individual case immediately before him, and is applying universal laws to the interpretation and redemption of that single life.

The same false perspective may be observed in many other modern interpretations of the Gospels. Jesus was a friend of the poor and a critic of the rich. "The spirit of the Lord is upon me," he said, "to preach the Gospel to the poor." "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of heaven!" "Woe unto you that are rich; blessed are ye poor." "It is easier for a camel to go through a needle's eye than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God." What, then, it is hotly urged, was Jesus but a prophet of social revolution, a class-conscious socialist; and what was the new religion but an anticipation of the modern programme of a rearrangement in economic production, distribution, and exchange? "Christianity," Professor Nitti has said, "was a vast economic revolution more than anything else." "The democracy of property," an American socialist has written, "was the larger revelation of Christ."

Here again the sayings of the Gospels must be accepted in all their solemn and permanent significance. The deceitfulness of riches, the responsibility of talent, the solemn alternatives of the

dedication of wealth or its abnegation—these warnings or rebukes are as convincing as ever. But it does not follow from these sayings that Jesus was a curbstone agitator, inflaming a class-conscious conflict. The modern revolutionist, if he listens at all to the teaching of the Gospels, hears in it nothing but the confirmation of his own social creed. He seizes on fragmentary utterances with no regard to their connection or intention. It is one more instance of literalism distorting the record. It mistakes the by-products of the teaching for its main intention. Whatever social changes Jesus may have foreseen, his mind was primarily fixed on spiritual change. He was not a reformer, but a revealer. He was concerned not so much with the production of goods as with the production of goodness. "Who made me," he said, "a judge or a divider over you?" A changed world might issue from his teaching, but it was to issue from a change of heart. He was not, first of all, a socialist but a saviour. He came to convert not things but men. "The preaching of Jesus," Harnack has declared with emphasis in his last volume, "and the establishing of a new religious brotherhood were not essentially a social agitation; that is, they did not issue from an antecedent class-conflict or annex themselves thereto, and in general had no direct connection with the social revolutions of the ancient world."

These considerations of the fallacies of literalism seem to point to the conclusion that the Christian religion is a much larger thing than many of its critics, or even of its defenders, have supposed. It assumes many forms, but is exhausted by none. Its fragmentary utterances may become impracticable guides, while its total view of life, its general law of conduct, may have permanent practicability. The Gospels are perennially perplexing to the literalist because they say so many different things. If each verse must be regarded as of equal weight, then each should balance and confirm another. The fact is, however, that at many points the teaching is self-contradictory. At one moment Jesus counsels non-resistance, and at another moment commends soldierliness. At one time he welcomes the peace of God; at another he burns with indignation. He blesses the poor without scorning the rich. He welcomes solitude, but serves society. He

proclaims the kingdom of God as coming in outward clouds of glory, yet finds that kingdom within the human heart. To one person he says, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest"; to another he says, "If any man will come after me, let him take up his cross and follow." In one saying he commends social equality—"I will give unto this last even as unto thee"; in another saying he announces a law of cumulative inequality—"To him that hath shall be given, and from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath." What do these apparent inconsistencies indicate? Do they condemn the teaching as illogical and wavering, swayed by circumstances rather than steadied by principles? Must one select a single saying, erect it as a monumental teaching, and discard as an interpolation or gloss whatever does not harmonize with this central law? On the contrary, it is precisely at this point that the teaching discloses a character and scope which makes it a practicable guide for modern men. A witty American once said: "It is easy to die for an idea, if you have only one idea." The greatness of Jesus is seen in his having so many ideas, for any one of which men have been willing to die. His teaching is marked by sanity and poise among solicitations to excess; by many-sidedness, by sympathetic wisdom. Thus the variations in the teaching are precisely what give the key to its interpretation. They forbid the attempt to fix one saying in the centre of the Gospel and all else in its circumference. They correct the reverent but misleading desire to study each occasional saying as a universal truth. They compel one to penetrate through the occasionalism of the teaching to the principles which these incidental utterances disclose, and to apply to new and unprecedented conditions a teaching which necessarily used the language and met the needs of its own time; in short, to pass from the letter of the Gospels to the spirit of the Gospels, and to confess, with Paul, that the letter killeth while the spirit giveth life. "True Christianity," a great English teacher has said,<sup>8</sup> "is not something which was published in Palestine and which has been handed down by a dead tradition ever since; it is a living and growing spirit, that learns the lessons of history, and is ever manifesting new powers and leading on to new truths."

On this conclusion depends the practicability of the Christian

<sup>8</sup> Edward Caird, *Lay Sermons and Addresses*, 1907, p. 67.

life. If the teaching of Jesus were a fixed deposit of revelation from which successive ages must draw their moral code, then the ethical supply might become exhausted as the demand of the world increased. A teaching fit for Galilee may become inapplicable to modern Europe. "Give to him that asketh of thee," may be good ethics in the simplicity of Nazareth and bad economics in the complexity of London. If the Christian life must conform to the conditions under which the Gospel teaching was originally given, then it is unquestionably true that we are "none of us Christians, and we know we ought not to be." It is, however, misdirected reverence which thus reduces the Christian religion to an unalterable fixity. The purpose of Jesus Christ was to free religion from this asphyxiation by the temporary, the technical, the external, and to give it room to breathe and to grow.

To reach this conclusion one has only to recall the characteristic language in which the general purpose of Jesus is described. As one reads the Gospels there meet him two great words which announce the nature of the teaching like recurring *motifs* reiterating a central theme. The first is the word Power; the second is the word Life. The first is the characteristic word of the Synoptic Gospels: "The multitude glorified God which had given such power unto man." "His word was with power." "Until the kingdom of God come with power." The second is the word of the Fourth Gospel: "I am the bread of life." "The life was the light of men." "He that hath the Son, hath life." "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit and they are life." "I am come that they may have life." But Power and Life are words, not of opinion or tradition, but of expansion, vitality, momentum, growth. They are the symbols of a dynamic faith. Power is generated to be applied. Life is given to be transmitted. To restrict power is to waste it; to save life is to lose it. The Christian life is thus not a thing to keep, but a thing to give; not an ancient tradition, but a new creation; not a stopping-place, but a way. "I am the way," said Jesus. The first title given to the new religion by its followers was "The Way." It was the power of God unto salvation. "Salvation," a great English teacher said,<sup>9</sup> "is nothing else than the preservation, restoration

<sup>9</sup> Hort, *Hulsean Lectures*, p. 101.

and exaltation of life." The Christian character is thus a living and expanding growth. The kingdom of God is like leaven, or like a great tree ; but leaven is a pervasive influence, the tree is an unfolding growth. Christian ethics is a science of spiritual dynamics. It deals with a world in motion. Its purpose is to communicate Power; its aim is to increase Life. When the Council of Trent explicitly anathematized the opinion that "Christ was given to mankind as a Redeemer, and not also as a legislator," it made the issue clear. The Christian religion as a form of legislation stands forever over against the Christian religion as a way of redemption. On the one hand is the imperial conception of the Church of Christ, on the other the spiritual conception. A form of government, a legislating hierarchy, has in its very nature the qualities of inflexibility and fixity. A Life, a Power, a redemptive force, has in it perennial possibilities of expansion and adaptation. "Truth," said John Milton, "is compared in Scripture to a streaming fountain. If her waters flow not in a perpetual progression, they sicken into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition."

We are brought through these considerations to a most obvious and yet a most challenging and humbling conclusion. "Not even now," said John Stuart Mill, "would it be easy, even for an unbeliever, to find a better translation for the rule of virtue from the abstract into the concrete than to endeavor so to live that Christ would approve of our life." Do not these reverent words disclose to us the nature of Christian ethics and the permanent practicability of the Christian life? It is a "translation from the abstract to the concrete"; the acceptance, not of a teaching, but of a teacher; not of a word recorded in documents, but of a word made flesh. The characteristic mark of the Christian life is its personal relationship. It is the intimacy of companionship, the loyalty of discipleship. Behind all the teachings of Jesus Christ concerning universal problems of God and man, of eschatology or ethics, lies his supreme concern for the individual and for the needs of personality; and behind all questions which the study of the Gospels may raise concerning the universe or the social order lies the response of the individual will to the summons of a Master. Jesus has been called the greatest of



socialists; but he may with no less justice be called the greatest of individualists. He had what the author of *Ecce Homo* called a passion for personality. He sought the one sheep, he found the one lost coin, he called the lost son back to his father and to himself; and from that time to this, however much the Christian life has been obscured and complicated by theologians or ecclesiastics, the vitality and continuity of discipleship have been secured by this perennial loyalty of the individual will, this translation of virtue from the abstract into the concrete.

This relation of character to character emancipates the modern Christian from all that is contemporary or incidental in the teaching of Jesus. One does not expect a teacher of another age to speak the language or answer all the problems of the modern world. His message must be given to his own time and colored by the habits of thought which then prevailed. But the teacher behind the teaching, the influences which he described as those of Power and Life, remain independent of historical conditions and are applicable to all ages. Personality, character, spirituality, idealism, vision, communion with God, have in them a quality of timelessness, and are capable of expansion, transmission, and utilization in all the varied conditions of a changing world. The problems of life shift with the shifting years, but the nature of life remains unchanged, and responds to the Life which is the light of men. The machinery of the world must be renewed and amplified with each generation; but the power which makes that machinery move towards spiritual ends remains the same which once made the multitude glorify God who had given such Power unto men. The mechanism halts till the power is applied, and as that power finds its way, like the mysterious force of electricity, along all the avenues of life, and enters the homes and work and darkness and cold of the modern world, then the question of the practicability of the Christian life is supplanted by the question of its utilization; and it is as though the wires which carry the Power sang above our heads, "I am come that these may have my Life, and may have it abundantly."